DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 639 CS 213 967

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TITLE Collaboration: Mutual Empowerment/Silencing? Or Both?
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (44th, San Diego, CA, March 31-April 3, 1993).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperation; Group Activities; Higher Education; *Language Attitudes; Personal Narratives; Power Structure; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Authorship; *Collaborative Composing; Dialogic Communication; Empowerment; *Voice (Rhetoric)

ABSTRACT

A dialogue between two writing collaborators reveals the act of collaboration as "empowering, liberating, exhilarating, and almost magical." Community-oriented theories of empowerment suggest collaboration can also be about reclaiming political and personal determinacy because working in pairs or groups can enable writers to encourage each other toward greater freedom of expression as they realign "authority" from external and institutional to internal and personal voices. Collaboration is a social and dialogical act of subjective construction because collaborators invent and edit notions of subjectivity as they engage with each other in writing and as they engage with each other in community. Even when collaboration is working optimally, there are barriers to dual authorship and ownership, but as a paper or book matures in succeeding drafts, real collaborators find it more and more difficult to distinguish whose words are whose. The potential of collaboration does seem to empower rather than to silence. (SAM)

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Carol Lea Clark Colette Connelly

Collaboration: Mutual Empowerment/Silencing? Or Both?

Carol: When collaboration is working well, co-writers somehow together come to understandings of meaning in a text that they wouldn't have realized alone. At its best, collaboration is empowering, liberating, exhilarating, almost magical.

Colette: Community-oriented theories of empowerment suggest collaboration can also be about reclaiming political and personal determinacy. By working in pairs or groups, writers can encourage each other to greater freedom of expression as they re-align "authority" from external and institutional to internal and personal voices.

Carol: So, there is more than one reason to collaborate in the writing of a text?

Colette: Of course. Collaboration offers an opportunity to negotiate ideological disagreement through a cooperative effort that is not supported by competitive, patriarchal models of literacy/writing. For instance, during the early phases of this project, we conceptualized our theoretical positions in terms of opposition. Your collaborative experiences had been consistently positive. Mine had not. Hence, we initially planned to argue against each other's viewpoints in a pro/con format. Instead, we came to a greater appreciation of each other's positions through our collaboration; we revised our polarized beliefs so that our discussion today is more consensual than antithetical. We both recognize the positive and negative possibilities of collaboration; your emphasis is on the individual writer while I consider collaboration in a social context.

Carol: Today, Colette and I will be discussing the liberating and silencing powers of co-authoring. Our presentation is based upon our various

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collaborative experiences--with colleagues and with each other--and upon what other collaborators have written about the process.

Colette: We will also consider how other collaborative voices--the texts we have read and studied, the colleagues we have worked with and talked with, and even our children--enter into our texts.

Carol: Colette and I decided that in this paper about collaboration we would try to preserve our individual voices, and that the content would discuss how we tried to merge our voices, while keeping them separate.

Colette: We have worked on this paper alternately, almost as if it were a series of short but merged letters we have written to each other but knowing we would have a larger audience.

Carol: But sometimes we have written each other's comment, remembering what the other has said or imagining what the other would say. For example, Colette's next comment is one I wrote for her, based on what I remember her saying.

Colette: We invite you to become part of this rather unusual paper. We hope you will tell us about your collaborative experiences by talking with us, and by sharing your experiences with us. We will try to preserve your voices in our finished text which, in principle, has been selected for publication in Collaboration/Cooperation/Coordination: An Anthology of Co-Endeavors edited by Elizabeth G. Peck and JoAnna Stephens Mink.

Carol: Where does collaboration begin? In the case of this paper it began because we were both working on projects having to do with collaboration, and we began talking together about the process of collaboration.

I was writing a collaborative paper with a colleague about Charles Alexander Eastman, the noted late nineteenth-century Dakota writer and Elaine

Goodale Eastman, who was his collaborator as well as his wife. Together the Eastmans produced numerous successful articles and books based on Eastman's childhood in the Dakota tribe and his acculturation into the white man's world. Goodale had written professionally before their marriage and did so again after their separation, though her individual writings were never as successful as the ones they wrote together. Eastman, who was the subject of their successful ventures, never produced a published text on his own. Thus, their writing was an illustration of the positive and negative consequences of collaboration.

Colette: I was embarking upon my first collaborative project, a paper on intertextuality and discourse community theory in composition studies, with a colleague--a friend--at TCU. I was also considering the degree to which we enter into collaborative relationships with our students--questioning if we can simultaneously represent institutional authority to them and become co-writers, partners in textual production, with those whom we supervise, instruct and mentor.

Carol: And about that time we heard a paper presented by two women from Vanderbilt University--Darlene Dralus and Jen Shelton--on subjectivity--a paper which they read in alternate voices as we are doing today.

Colette: In this paper, Darlene and Jen addressed the merger of the personal and the professional in their writing relationship. Their presentation was an extraordinarily honest, powerful and inspiring performance. I consider them collaborators in our presentation today in the most immediate sense; I also consider them influential collaborators in my own ongoing subjective construction, co-authors of the sense of self that I am able to recognize and articulate in present moment.

Carol: So, our original abstract for this text grew out of our current projects, though the abstract did not mention these interests. I wrote most of the original abstract, based on our conversations. Colette wrote the revised abstract and submitted it to Peck and Mink for consideration in their book. Then we returned to other more pressing writing and teaching obligations; and, though we discussed the project occasionally, we did not begin working on this paper until this Spring. Then we began to consider some of the theory about collaboration.

Colette: Actually, Carol, I tend to think we started working on this paper during the flight home from the Vanderbilt conference--perhaps even earlier, during Darlene and Jen's presentation. If you recall, all the papers read for that panel (including yours on the Eastman-Goodale collaboration) generated intense discussion. I remember the discussion beginning in a dialectical, question and answer mode. Individual members of the audience posed questions to panelists. But that pattern soon gave way to a less structured (may I venture "collaborative"?) conversational interchange that broke down the author/audience opposition. By the time the session ended, the professional relationships institutionalized by the academic conference had been subverted. I think that a community of knowers with affective rather than institutional bonds between members had been forged as the result of this exchange.

Carol: Yes, I think you are right about how our collaboration on this paper began. I remember the intensity of that panel session did carry over into discussions we had back at our hotel and on the plane. Now that you've started me on that train of thought, it also continued in many phone conversations where the paper would be one topic of many as we interacted as friends. How often have we talked for an hour or more until one of other of our daughters interrupted with a request for attention.

Lunsford and Lisa Ede found that participants in their study of writers in seven different professions answered that they always wrote alone when other parts of the questionnaires indicated they had participated often in co-authoring. Lunsford and Ede suggest that writers cling to the notion of "writing as a solitary activity in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary" (73). In the case of this paper, I didn't recognize collaboration even when I was looking for it.

Colette: I really like the way you phrase that, Carol. It suggests that we often collaborate in the production of meaning even when we don't realize it. Since Jen and Darlene's presentation, I've come to believe that collaborative writing is not only a communal practice, but also a community-building practice. Writers, either accidentally or deliberately engaging with each other for the purpose of textual production, forge a discourse community as they collaborate. Consequently, collaboration is a social and dialogical act of subjective construction; collaborators invent and edit notions of subjectivity as they engage with each other in writing and as they engage with each other in writing community.

Carol: Wait a moment, what do you mean by edit notions of subjectivity?

Colette: By subjectivity, I'm referring to the self's sense of itself, the self's awareness of self. Today, I am aware of a different sense of self than I was a year ago, partly as a result of my collaboration with you and others. I have appropriated the voices of my collaborators in the ongoing process of constructing subjectivity. Even as I make this claim, I am conscious that my conceptualization of subjectivity as a plurality of voice has been influenced by my exposure to your work with Bahktin's notion of heteroglossia, for example.

The subjective revision made possible by collaboration indicates that communal writing can be mutually enabling, as Carol's many successful

collaborative experiences attest. Team efforts, expressly widening the participatory domain of the meaning-making process that is writing, offer collaborators an opportunity to empower themselves and their partners. When collaboration is working well, therefore, co-writing generates understandings of text and self that collaborators wouldn't have realized alone. Hence, Carol is able to claim that collaboration is enabling, empowering and exhilarating.

Carol: The communal mode of collaboration that Colette has described corresponds to what Lunsford and Ede call dialogic collaboration. In one of their papers about collaboration in different professions, Lunsford and Ede suggest that collaboration is not one process or mode but a number of modes which can be divided into two categories--hierarchical and dialogic. Lunsford and Ede describe dialogic collaborative relationships as loosely structured. Participants don't have fixed roles and they recognize that the process of collaboration is as important as the goals themselves.

Mary Belenky and her co-authors of Women's Ways of Knowing obviously engaged in dialogic collaboration. In an interview with Evelyn Ashton-Jones and Dene Kay Thomas, Belenky reports of their "pajama-party" meetings in a motel in New Hampshire where for three years they met every five weeks to work around the clock for three or four days at a time. They valued the time together of working, sleeping on their thoughts, and "returning to the conversation--without distractions from children and telephones" (30). The insights of Women's Ways of Knowing are a testament to the effectiveness of their dialogic collaboration.

Colette: But collaboration is not always so congenial. Discourse is a social act whose performance is governed by the pre-existing, self-perpetuating architecture of cultural norms. Writers whose voices have been formulated within

architecture of cultural norms. Writers whose voices have been formulated within an experience of social disenfranchisement may re-enact and thus reinscribe inequitable, culturally determined practices in their collaborative enterprises. At its worst, then, collaboration is disabling. Co-authors find they can't write anything together; and they can't write anything separately as my first collaborative experience demonstrates.

The metaphor of women's silencing in "patriarchal" society has often been painfully real for me--personally and professionally. For instance, I find "public speaking," even in its limited definition as class participation or voicing disagreement with a friend or relative, excruciatingly difficult. I frequently prefer not to speak rather than endure the anxiety I associate with "public speaking." It is only since I entered graduate school that I have begun to consciously construct a "personal voice" and I often find the process discomforting--perhaps this is one of the reasons that Jen and Darlene's presentation made such an impression on me. In any event, my relationships with authority and its representatives are often ambiguous: while I resist subordination, its familiarity is seductively comfortable.

Hence, my male collaborator's joking characterization of our writing partnership as a "wild" motorcycle ride was initially humorous in the context of our friendship. But his quipping directive to "hop on the back and hang on" too accurately described our enactment of the collaborative writing process. While he sat directly in front of the computer screen, writing, I positioned myself behind or beside him, commenting and editing. My inability to challenge this symbolic configuration left me feeling that not only had I been silenced, but I had colluded in my own silencing. For this and other reasons the relationship subsequently disintegrated to the extent that we could neither write together nor affirm each

other's separately written texts. Currently, our paper on intertextuality is buried deep in a file cabinet, testimony of a collaborative relationship gone awry.
Carol: In Colette's perception, her mixed-gender collaboration was "hierarchical," with one author having more control, more power than the other. It re-enacted women's traditional subordination in patriarchal society.

You know, Colette, it's beginning to sound like we are privileging dialogic over hierarchical--and maybe we are, perhaps because of our experiences and the academic setting in which we work. But it is important for us to remember that hierarchical collaboration is the preferred mode in many settings--such as technical or business. Indeed, in their study of writing in different professions Lunsford and Ede found hierarchical collaboration in many technical writing settings. However, their definition of such collaboration focused more on textual production than the social relationships constructed between writers. Documents in draft form traveled in a "rigidly linear way, through level upon level of bureaucratic authority," being reviewed and revised at each level. Frequently, those involved perceived the process as "efficient and productive if sometimes unsatisfying" (237).

But even when collaboration is working optimally, there are barriers, concerns [and here we are again privileging dialogic collaboration]. Belenky, in her interview, indicated a reluctance to give up control over her own voice in the collaborative process. Belenky and her collaborators divided their book--different collaborators wrote the first drafts of chapters, and they made a decision to send around drafts in hard copy form rather than disks. She explained, "If you sent your disk around and people start changing it, your words and theirs get merged too fast; you need some sort of a balance. Writing collaboratively gets very confusing because, when you're really working

real ownership. Yet you have to keep , or you ought to keep, your own voice...."(32)

But Belenky and her collaborators found "at times someone would write something so gorgeous that you would think it needed to be in your own chapter and you'd fight for it . . . . This process is really very sensuous. It's so loving to have that mingling going on--knowing that these are stolen words in a way, words coaxed out of someone" (32).

In a project involving my students, I have been troubled by my appropriation of their language, an appropriation that I'm not convinced was "loving." The project involved a group of students in my freshman composition class in the writing of an article of their self-perception as writers. I quoted extensively from their written and verbal comments and shared authorship credit with the class as a whole. But it bothered me at least a little that I was using their words for my own purposes, though I tried to preserve the intent of their comments.

How do writers deal with fear of losing their own voices and also with fear of stealing someone else's words?

Colette: That's a difficult question to answer, Carol. I suspect that your discomfort with "appropriating" your students' language is partially related to your position as a representative of institutional authority in your relationship with them. It indicates a recognition that students, often a subordinate population in the academic discourse community, are a captive audience and that their self-determinacy is somehow infringed upon when they have no choice but to collaborate with the professor. The appropriation of students' voices by an authority figure thus becomes problematic. We've all heard horror stories about professors who have profited from their appropriation of students' language but

professors who have profited from their appropriation of students' language but failed to acknowledge students' role in their success. Your discomfort with appropriating students' voices also reveals the paradoxes generated by engaging in practices of resistance against the competitive, patriarchal model of education while we operate within it as we do when we collaborate.

Moreover, I'm suspicious of making currency of language. I am reluctant to endorse a position that suggests language is intellectual property. In fact, collaboration is appealing to me in part because it disrupts our tendency to claim ownership of language and knowledge. Such a claim works in service of exclusionary pedagogical and literacy practices; it implies that language can be used as social capital, that language can be used to regulate access to a central social authority. Yet through my mixed-gender collaboration I recognize the necessity of "owning" my voice.

Carol: I think I'm more comfortable with the idea of making currency of language, at least when it involves my own words, but I would define this practice, not as social ownership of words but ownership in a literal, commercial sense. I don't think I have ever experienced the same fear of losing my voice that both you and Belenky describe, perhaps because of my background as a free-lance writer. When I was a free-lancing, I sometimes worked with other writers when the subject matter indicated a need for another perspective. One of my more unconventional collaborations, though, was a book which I ghost wrote for a physician. He suggested chapter topics, and left me to do the research and writing. After my part of the project was finished, he had the book privately published to distribute to his patients. The book bears his name as sole author, as we agreed.

I have also, in a sense, collaborated with editors. When I have turned in

changes, though they might request verification of facts. Often, though, they would make re-writing changes that I wouldn't know about until the articles were in print. Usually, I thought their changes tightened or improved my writing, though occasionally I disagreed with them. I rarely mentioned the changes to editors, though; I guess a free-lance magazine writer, at least in my case, loses control of her words once they are paid for, even my name appears on the article.

My experiences have taught me to value the writing process--and being paid for writing--more than the feeling of ownership of specific words. Or maybe I have learned not to be bothered by the prospect that the process of collaboration continues after I release my words. I have usually trusted my collaborators to deal kindly with what I have written.

Colette: Well, Carol, why are you bringing it up if it really doesn't bother you?

Carol: After thinking about your question, I realize there is a distinction between free-lance writing and ghost writing. With free-lance magazine writing, my name appears on my text, and I do indeed trust editors to make a sincere effort to enhance or enable my words. But with ghost writing, my name nowhere appears on the text, and even if I am paid, I am disempowered as a collaborator. I've learned that I wouldn't again engage in such a contractual arrangement.

Colette: I, too, have learned much through collaboration. Each collaborative relationship is instructive. Each new collaboration offers the possibility of revising inequitable social configurations. Working in groups or pairs, writers can encourage each other's attempts to re-align "**author**-ity." Collaborators can support their co-writers' conscious appropriation of authority from norm-governing institutions. Collaborators can foster their co-writers' cultivation and deployment of the assured, integrated voice that the joint authors

of Women's Ways of Knowing attribute to "constructivists," knowers who identify themselves, not others, as knowledge-holders and knowledge-makers. Since my first collaboration I have become sensitive to the necessity for collaborators to be partners, to consciously employ affirming, community-building practices. I have also come to the realization that collaborators must sometimes challenge each other in order to wield empowered voices in the discourse community constructed by their collaborative engagement. This growing knowledge has certainly enabled my most recent collaborative ventures, including this one with you!

Carol: Perhaps, since we are nearing the end of our time, we should return to the major images indicated by our title--mutual empowerment and mutual silencing. In the process of writing this paper, I think Colette and I have consciously tried to empower each others' writing--and that objective overrode even the necessity of accomplishing our task. It took us a long time--with some false starts--to get going with the writing, perhaps because we didn't want to preempt each other's voice. As we have worked on this paper we have sent a disk and hard copy back and forth, always being careful to note what was changed so we wouldn't subdue the other's words. Yet, as the paper matured in succeeding drafts, it is more and more difficult to distinguish whose words are whose--if it matters.

Colette: I think our writing relationship has been successful in two registers--the personal and the professional--and under two models of learning--one collaborative and the other competitive. We have empowered each other personally; we have enriched our understanding of ourselves and each other as the result of our collaboration. We have also empowered each other professionally through the circulation of our text--here today and later in print. We are acutely conscious of the paradoxes embedded in this interface of collaboration and

competition. Our collaborative relationship enables our success in a competitive paradigm. In turn, this professional accomplishment compels us to continue our collaborative relationship until the project is finished even as you begin your teaching career in El Paso and I remain in Ft. Worth to complete my dissertation. Together we have achieved something we couldn't accomplish on our own, at least at this time--none of the abstracts we independently submitted to this conference were accepted, an example of concurrent institutional silencing and empowerment.

Carol: You notice that we are privileging the potential of collaboration to empower rather than to silence.

Colette: Maybe that's because this collaboration has worked well for both of us. But it does leave us with questions. . . .

Carol: Just as the original abstract ended with questions. Maybe we should do the same here: Is collaboration a more cumbersome method of writing? Or more effective?

Colette: What about the relationship between subjective construction and writing? Is it gender specific?

Carol: Is it possible to write without collaborating?

Colette: Can we own "voice" without capitalizing language?

Carol: Would we want to?

Colette: What about accidental collaboration?

Carol: How have you experienced collaboration?

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